

Indelicate Philosophies

The Convergence of French and Japanese Erotic Arts

by

Veda Lane Stocton

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Mira R. Waits, Ph.D., Thesis Director



James Toub, Ph.D., Second Reader



Mira R. Waits, Ph.D., Honors Director, Department of Art

## Abstract

Nineteenth-century French artists' appropriation of Japanese imagery has often been discussed as representative of orientalist practice in the West. The end of Japanese isolationist foreign policy in 1853 introduced the Western world to Japanese art and ignited a subsequent lust for the 'Japanese aesthetic.' However, there is a gap in the scholarship. French and Japanese similarities prior to their nineteenth-century contact has not been greatly discussed. My project analyzes the social, philosophical, and creative connections between France and Japan prior to 1853, specifically by focusing on each country's pornographic prints, which served as forms of social critique.

I argue that erotic representations in France and Japan produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries laid the foundation for further artistic influence on one another in the nineteenth century. Artists from both countries were heavily engaged with representations of the nude, as well as exploring practices understood at the time as sexual deviancy. My research provides a cross-cultural perspective on politically and socially deviant art. The use of pornographic prints is assumed to be "d'une seule main (of one hand)", but contain as well the acute admonition of those in power through a libertine approach. This analysis is necessary since each artistic movement was tied to their respective country's impending revolutions, suggesting a correlation between fleeting pleasure and political upheaval.

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## PROLOGUE:

Edo and Paris are markedly distinct in their distribution of frivolous and erotic imagery. Despite attempts at censorship and strict social regimes, each has cultivated a space in which the world secedes from the oppression of totalitarian governments and discovers respite in spaces of materialism and physicality.

In the following thesis, I will focus on each country and their respective philosophical traditions, cultural inspirations, and creative output in order to analyze how two cultures lacking significant contact maintained similarities that would eventually inspire mutual appropriation of popular imagery. The countries of France and Japan will be compared in their creative output and reactions regarding erotic art, as well as their subsequent revolutions. These connections pose the possibility of such politically based erotic prints being partially responsible, or at least anticipatory, of drastic social reconstruction.

I want to address the hesitance of art historical scholarship to fully acknowledge or discuss the original use of seventeenth and eighteenth century erotica. In this thesis, I will be discussing pornography and its political influence through a cross-cultural study of France and Japan. The scandal of these images will be addressed on both their primary and secondary characteristics: the pornographic and the political. Representations of masturbation or encouraging sexual acts are often avoided or glossed over in academic discourses, but I would like to approach these images with an understanding of erotic imagery both as a viable source of pleasurable art and political uprising. Evidence abounds that self-pleasure exists in history, even when it happens to be mingled with social movements. We have encountered a social era in which sexuality is valid in expression and through this research I would like for it to be

expressed that pleasure can be used as a tool individually and socially without the baggage of obscenity.

I will begin with fabricated narratives of contact and the respective histories of Japan and France in order to establish their similarities politically and render a comprehensive timeline of production. I will then analyze their philosophical and social parallels, tying them together with the concepts of Wabi Sabi and Libertinism which serve as a foundation for the Floating World and hedonistic pleasures. I will briefly focus as well on cultural inspirations through theatre and literature, two spaces in which reality becomes mutable.

Each country's erotic imagery will be analyzed both as a representation of pleasure and as a form of social critique. I will begin with discussions of the nude, sexual encounters, and sexual deviancy in order to establish a foundation for politically derisive erotic art. I will follow this with a discussion of the social dissent that can be found in a variety of publications in the eighteenth century; focusing on religion, political figures, and general distaste for those in power. I will conclude with a discussion of the French Revolution and the Meiji Restoration, espousing that erotic prints in part foreshadowed the uprisings of the middle and lower classes. This research will assert both the similarities between two seemingly disparate cultures and the possibility of "indelicate"<sup>1</sup> production as a potent form of political statement.

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<sup>1</sup> The application of the term indelicate refers to the production of erotica as generally immodest or lacking in accordance with established social mores. The term may also be applied as disruptive towards diplomatic social order. I will refrain from utilizing terms that suggest representations of erotica as being solely vulgar.

## INTRODUCTION:

## Apocryphal Narratives of Contact

France and Japan have experienced striking visual histories characterized by political regime and occupy a unique space of interest in art historical scholarship. Their philosophical, social, and artistic similarities have brought them together throughout history, therefore it is natural that comparisons be drawn between them before their eventual contact.

## TOKUGAWA PERIOD JAPAN

Before the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1603, Japan was characterized by a series of shifting power dynamics among warrior class rulers. Since the twelfth century, opposing shoguns struggled for territorial control and by the fourteenth century, each *daimyo*<sup>2</sup> was under the generalized power of a different warlord. This period of clashing warrior classes is considered the “middle ages” of Japan, rife with civil unrest and mutating jurisdictions. The sixteenth century experienced grueling civil war in which each ruler attempted to take other territories by force until the victory of Tokugawa Ieyasu at the battle of Sekigahara in 1600. By 1603, Tokugawa Ieyasu was appointed shogun and Edo (modern Tokyo) became the capital of the Tokugawa shogunate (Tokugawa, 20).

The Edo, or Tokugawa, period is considered Japan’s modern age, and is characterized by stringent leadership, foreign isolationism, and an admiration for a growing artistic culture. Rather than a series *bushi*<sup>3</sup> leaders, the Tokugawa shogun held transcendent power over their *daimyo*.

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<sup>2</sup> *Daimyos* are territories under the shogun comprised of “family members, vassals, and the general population,” therefore each daimyo was relatively small in comparison to that of the Tokugawa shogunate (Tokugawa, 20.)

<sup>3</sup> *Bushi* defines the warrior class of Japan in the 12<sup>th</sup> century during the initiation of generalized shogunate rule.

Under the organization of *shinôkôshô*<sup>4</sup>, the citizens of Edo were ascribed to their distinct classes (Kita, 29). This class system was strict and hierarchical with the emperor and court nobility operating as a nominal ruling class at the top, the shogun and daimyo in the middle, and the peasants, craftsmen, and merchants at the bottom (Fig. 1). Towns under the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate were expected to remain within their stratified classes.

The feudal Tokugawa shogunate supported a highly populous inner cosmopolitan with relative peace. Residence of Edo was a requirement of the feudal lords of the Tokugawa shogunate, with each lord required to spend every other year in the exponentially growing capital. This caused the city to grow in stature with hundreds of palatial homes and a large market for entertainment opportunities (Calza, 7-8).

The Edo period lasted for 268 years until the Meiji Restoration. During this time the 250 precincts of Edo were occupied by the samurai of the militarized hereditary ruling class, who gained power following the decline of the imperial court of Japan, causing the *bushi* to gradually usurp the old system and establish their own form of leadership (Tokugawa, 19). The emperor of Japan, who experienced a depletion of his power since the twelfth century, lived far enough away from these areas that his power carried little weight. He was seen as more of a symbol than an active ruler. Although the country exhibited no need for an emperor in the feudal system of the shogunate, the minor status of the emperor remained an honored symbolic presence until the end of the Edo period (Tokugawa, 19).

Although exceptions exist on both sides, the relative isolation of the country operated equally towards those leaving and entering Japan. The country had been a lively location for

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<sup>4</sup> *Shinôkôshô* operates as a four-part societal division based on Confucian social structures in order to stabilize the country. Because of the *shinôkôshô* system, which commonly asserted laws in favor of the upper classes, the art of ukiyo-e is the art of the struggling *chônin*, or townspeople class.

trade in precious materials, but towards the middle of the sixteenth century, Japan began to witness a severe depletion of natural resources. Japan periodically restricted and relaxed trade relations based on shogunate interest and natural resources. The Tokugawa shogunate only participated in trade relationships that could be controlled directly by the shogunate (Screech, 6-9). Under a strict foreign trade policy, Japan became a bubble of traditional cultural heritage and pride. In regards to the severity of punishment for disregarding the parameters of Japanese foreign policy, rumors circulated that for one to trespass the boundaries of Japanese territory meant a brutal death.

#### NARRATIVES OF CONTACT

“These men are traders of *Seinamban* [Southwest Barbary]. They understand to a certain degree the distinction between Superior and Inferior, but I do not know whether they have a proper system of ceremonial etiquette. They eat with their fingers instead of with chopsticks such as we use. They show their feelings without any self-control. They cannot understand the meaning of written characters. They are people who spend their lives roving hither and yon. They have no fixed abode and barter things which they have for those they do not, but withal they are a harmless sort of people” (Boxer, 29).

This first-hand account of the arrival of the Portuguese in Japan during the sixteenth century expresses the Japanese perspective of foreign travelers. Japan frequently dealt with the arrival of Western Europeans desiring international connections; especially those aspiring to convert citizens to the Christian faith. By 1639 the Portuguese, ripe with a religious agenda, were expelled from the country<sup>5</sup>. Others

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<sup>5</sup> According to Timon Screech, the Japanese authorities were aware of the religious proceedings enacted in Mexico by the Portuguese and feared “the unsettling effects of Catholicism” (Screech, 8).

proclaiming the Christian faith in direct opposition to Japanese tradition were also given the ultimatum between “apostasy or death” (Screech, 9).

History is resplendent with apocryphal narratives of the relationship between the West and Japan. In the nineteenth century, a popular myth about Japan dominated Western thinking; the myth perpetuated the notion that, prior to 1856, Japan operated in isolation, which implied that Japan was locked in the past due to its longstanding *sakoku*<sup>6</sup>.

However, this myth about Japan as a hidden treasure of cultural isolation has today been discredited: scholars cite a variety of practices, such as Tokugawa trade practices which dictated the size of ships and amount of legal travel, that complicate the narrative of isolation (Lippett, 1). Japan was not fully isolated from the West under *sakoku*, as foreign trade and international interactions persisted, although of a particular kind. The West could not, or at least never did, invade, blockade, or exert power over Japan, thereby making the relationship between Japan and the West unique in their trade correspondence. Therefore, Japan and Europe maintained little contact due to a lack of veritable interest by either, rather than the closed foreign policy of a strict shogunate. Each culture maintained an interest in the idea of the other, as is reflected in their appropriative arts, but not enough to sufficiently seek extensive contact until the nineteenth century (Screech, 1-3).

The prints exported from Japan by the Dutch East India company during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries occupied a critical role in the West’s recognition and growing admiration of Japan. French artist Félix Braquemond claimed to have discovered Japanese Ukiyo-e prints in 1856 when he encountered volumes of Katsushika Hokusai’s work put to use

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<sup>6</sup> Under the Tokugawa Shogunate of Japan from 1633-1853, the country operated under the *sakoku*, or isolationist policy of foreign affairs, barring Japan from outside influence. The term *sakoku* entails absolute isolation, but respective periods of “free port” existed, which account for the presence of erotica in countries west of Japan (Johnson).

as packing material. Ultimately, this claim was dismissed, as it is most unlikely that Hokusai prints were stuffed around other items for shipping. There is also evidence of a wide variety of Japanese prints distributed and shown as part of collections much earlier than Braquemond's proposal (Johnson). Within the sub-category of Japanese erotic prints, the earliest prints appear in London in 1613, constituting "certaine lasciuious<sup>7</sup> bookes and pictures." These novels were shortly burned after their discovery for their scandalous content, but that didn't impede the influx of and interest in Ukiyo-e<sup>8</sup> and Shunga<sup>9</sup> (Screech, 13). The prints were widely available in Europe around 1810 through smuggling routes just outside of Edo and the persistence of black market trade. The Dutch East India company catalyzed this trade and the market grew, following their involvement in trade with Japan. For example, Isaac Titsingh, a senior official of the Dutch East India company, displayed his personal Japanese print collection in Paris by 1812. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Japanese prints were a common presence in Europe as a result of Dutch trade. Japanese art was often moved during periodic accounts of "free port," which were dependent on the stringency of the shogun and eventually made their way to France.

#### ROCOCO PERIOD FRANCE

The Rococo period of art in France loosely dates from around 1700 and the last years of Louis XIV to the beginnings of the French Revolution in 1789 (Milam, 1). Late seventeenth century France was under the monarchical power of Louis XIV, in which grand architecture in

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<sup>7</sup> "Lasciuious" here means lascivious.

<sup>8</sup> I will be using the term "Ukiyo-e" to generally refer to "pictures, paintings or illustrations (*e*) of the Floating World (*ukiyo*)." According to the Dictionary of Ukiyo-e (*Ukiyo-e Jiten*), the compound term was sparingly used in Tokugawa era Japan in comparison to other more specific terms, such as *azuma-e* (Eastern/Edo images), *tan-e* (red images), or *urushi-e* (lacquered images), which described the location, color, or finish of prints. I will use the generalized term in order to lessen confusion, but it should not be assumed that ukiyo-e encapsulates all images relating to the *ukiyo* (floating world) (Kita, 31).

<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the mention of Shunga in this thesis refers specifically to the erotic representations within the Ukiyo-e genre. The term Shunga is a modern construction.

support of the monarchy was popularized in an effort to maintain the traditions of antiquity and classicism. Louis XIV encouraged a flourishing of the decorative arts in France, but his personal style prevented innovation or creativity. It was therefore the responsibility of the artists at court to earn the patronage of the king and influence the art that would be produced. Despite an inclination by the king towards academic classicism and a favor for traditional aesthetics, the playful forms that would later characterize Rococo were formed in the royal court.

The playfulness and experimentation of Rococo was formed in part through necessity for creativity in the presence of financial distress propagated by the royal court. The persistence of military campaigns in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries rendered traditional grand spaces a financial impossibility, but the building programs of France persisted in the early 1700's. Materials such as silver and bronze were melted down in 1689 and 1709 to fund wars. Expensive decorative materials such as gold were banned from usage in French architecture and interior design in 1691. These economic changes spawned an interest in experimenting with differing, cheaper materials, such as timber paneling and porcelain. *Petits châteaux*, small pleasure houses, became more popular in France for their delicate intimacy.

The class structure of France during the Rococo was hierarchical, separated into three Estates of power (Fig. 2). The First Estate included, similar to the Japanese emperor, the nominal symbol of God and the clergy. The monarch and nobility occupied the Second Estate, which held all of the ruling power and most of the land. The Third Estate contained the working classes. Individuals were encouraged to remain within their realm of the hierarchical structure, but artists had a unique mobility that allowed them to trespass the definitive lines of stratification and conform to both the noble and lower classes.

The Rococo flourished as a byproduct of a culture desiring outlandish decoration in response to government restrictions. Les petits châteaux experienced a height in popularity in the early 1700's and the youthful style of the Rococo rendered itself a lightweight counterpart to the rigidity of previous popular styles, such as the grandeur of Baroque. The rule of Louis XV solidified the popularity of Rococo style and is commonly called the *style Louis XV*. The King's mistress, the marquise de Pompadour, specifically funded *fêtes galantes*<sup>10</sup> painters and brought the Rococo to the court as a continuation of the grandeur of Louis XV's great-grandfather (Milam, 1-14). The Rococo period of France is centered around the sponsorship of artists by the aristocracy, who owned most of the wealth of France and were able to experience life as a series of the self-indulgent encounters that the lower classes would view as a form of frivolous escapism until the eve of the Revolution.

The parallels between France and Japan considering strict government, frivolous art, and social backlash render them deftly compatible. Each country's response to their situation, manifested in indelicate imagery, unite them as cultures trapped between regime and revolution.

## CULTURE

The official arrival of Japanese art in the West inspired French artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to create art which drew from the flattened, colorful prints, but before this contact France and Japan were resplendent with societal and cultural similarities. Their distinct fleeting pleasures under strict regime and monarchical power led to societies which utilized painting and printmaking, specifically of the erotic genre, as a method of dissent. Neither may have influenced the other or have been directly involved in the initial production of images, but the

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<sup>10</sup> The Historical Dictionary of Rococo art categorizes *fêtes galantes* paintings as a genre in which paintings “describe subjects in which variously costumed figures pursue activities of leisure, love, and sociability [...] As subject categories, they blur the boundaries between scenes of everyday life and theatrical fantasy” (Milam, 105).

correlations among social hierarchies and nihilistic thought permeates each culture and their production of erotica as a backlash against their respective regimes. Fleeting pleasures, nihilist philosophy, and libertine expression characterize each period just before periods of consequential defiance and political restructuring.

## SOCIETAL SIMILARITIES

### The Floating World, Nihilism, and Libertinism

Amidst stifling regimes and blatant inequalities, the countries of Japan and France seem to float carelessly in the representations of the world around them. This sentiment can be seen in the *Embarkation for Cythera* (1717) by Jean-Antoine Watteau (Fig. 3) and *Winter Party* (18<sup>th</sup> c.) by Utagawa Toyoharu (Fig. 4). Within each image, the inhabitants are encountering the moment; partying and seeking pleasure from one another. In the *Embarkation for Cythera*, the men and women lightheartedly interact within a setting of lush trees, cherubs, and a ship which has either just brought them from or is taking them to the mythical island of love and delight: Cythera. In *Winter Party* a similar sentiment can be seen in which the characters are engrossed in themselves: playing music, flirting, and drinking tea. The individuals in the scene express an intimate warmth absent in the frozen landscape behind them. Each image portrays a sense of delight and pleasure, but the fleeting daylight and impermanence of the seasons express that these pleasures are ephemeral.

The Tokugawa shogunate and the French monarchy exacted totalitarian rule which cultivated the need for the escapism and fantastic creation of their respective citizens, including the nobility and lower classes. The creative production of each country focuses on the idealization of a world filled with the sorrows of the terrestrial. A timelessness abounds which has been classified by scholarship as frivolity; cultures of escapism, nihilist thought, and the desire to press against their sorrows by exploring and representing temporal pleasures.

### UKIYO-E: THE FLOATING WORLD AND FLEETING PLEASURE

“Long ago a man out walking encountered a hungry tiger, which proceeded to chase and corner him at the edge of a small precipice. The man jumped to avoid

the impending danger and in doing so managed to catch the limb of a tree growing from the small escarpment. While he hung there he became aware of a second tiger, this one at the foot of the precipice, waiting for him to fall. As his strength began to wane the man noticed a wild strawberry that was growing within his reach. He gently brought it to his lips in the full knowledge that it would be the last thing he ever ate—how sweet it was.” (Juniper).

This Zen parable provides two distinct possibilities for understanding the reasoning behind the nihilist philosophy of *Wabi Sabi*<sup>11</sup>, the Japanese aesthetic of imperfection and incompleteness. This aesthetic principle also helps to formulate in part the concept of the floating world. From one perspective, the strawberry encapsulates the distractions of the temporal realm and how earthly pleasure can cause detriment to those who take advantage of it. From the perspective of *Wabi Sabi*, though, the “bittersweet taste of the last strawberry” encapsulates the simultaneous delight and despondence associated with living in a temporary, unpredictable world (Juniper). *Wabi Sabi* and the acceptance of imperfection permeates the conditions of both Japan and France; two spaces in which the cornered individual seeks a moment of temporal delight. The countries thrived on the need-based constructions of their own fantasies.

Just as the Rococo reflects an appreciation of *rocailles*, *coquilles*<sup>12</sup>, and the imperfections found in the natural world, *Wabi Sabi* seeks “such qualities as impermanence, humility, asymmetry, and imperfection” (Milam) (Juniper). The Ukiyo-e prints of Japan and the Rococo

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<sup>11</sup> The aesthetic concept of *Wabi Sabi* is extremely abstract, but posits value on the imperfect, incomplete, or temporal. This concept has been influenced many other disciplines within the arts of Japan, from Noh theatre to flower arranging. *Wabi Sabi*, like Rococo, finds visual completion in the incomplete, asymmetrical, and temporary.

<sup>12</sup> *Rocailles* and *coquilles* are the French terms for pebbles and shells, two methods of Rococo aesthetic that emphasize asymmetry and harmony with nature as a reaction against the former, more classical Baroque style.

prints of France emphasize the simultaneous occurrence of pleasure and melancholy in their renditions of floating world culture. They also directly oppose the values of the Hellenic worldview, which seeks to value and uphold “permanence, grandeur, symmetry, and perfection” (Juniper). Two representations of the “Floating Worlds” of Japan and France serve to exemplify this appreciation for imperfection and temporary delight: *Two Girls Playing on a Bed* (1770) (Fig. 1) by Jean Honoré Fragonard, and *A Young Woman in a Summer Shower* (1765) (Fig. 2) by Suzuki Harunobu. Each image contains a moment of realization and surprise; the young woman running from the downpour of rain realizes her sandal has slipped off and the young girl standing on a plush bed reacts to the puppy playing beneath her legs. With asymmetrical compositions and an emphasis on luminous coloration, each image focuses on the momentary and bittersweet delight of the temporal world. The facial expressions of the two young girls appear youthful and offer momentary surprise and delight as they encounter the moment. The images also contain erotic appeal, with open garments revealing bare ankles, legs, and in Fragonard’s painting, genitalia.

## LIBERTINISM

“Here is another flood of insult, in which he froths at the mouth more fiercely still. He calls me atheist and corruptor of youth, and charges me with indulging in the practice of all imaginable vices” (Théophile de Viau<sup>13</sup>, Gautier, 85).

Libertinism reached ultimate popularity in France in the eighteenth century as a corollary of anti-establishment sentiments driven by the impending French Revolution (Nacol, 6). Before the Revolution, anti-libertine sentiments were so vehemently enforced that in August 1623 the poet Théophile de Viau was condemned to death by being burned at the Place de Grève as a

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<sup>13</sup> Here Viau is speaking in regards to the clergy before the ensuing trial which would condemn him to death.

heretic (Van Damme, 113). His crime was the endorsement of sodomy in his publication of *Le Parnasse satyrique (The Satirical Parnassus)* (1622), a book of erotic poetry collected from different anonymous authors containing the pornographic sonnet by Viau. While held in the Conciergerie, Viau wrote of his experiences and that “whatever [he] did write was worse than any murder” according to those responsible for his imprisonment (Gautier, 91). This account by Viau attests to the experiences and trials of those practicing libertine writing.

The libertine stance, more political than that of *Wabi Sabi*, served to undermine the powerful through expressions of hedonism. The Marquis de Sade is the most notable libertine of French literary tradition with novels of sexual awakening such as *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795). A sociopolitical dialogue amongst various characters, the book condemns the contemporary politics of France with passages expressing disdain for the monarchy and the Church through eroticism and sexual deviancy. Prints from the text show characters in situations which would be considered scandalous to the Church, such as a print containing a group of five people participating in an atypical sexual encounter. The group is knotted together precariously on a divan in a cooperative effort of achieving pleasure. The two figures nestled beneath the three standing are embracing while a man pleasures both of them from behind. Another figure is being pleased by the same man while penetrated from behind by a woman wearing a strap on (Fig. 3). Such images contrary to the acceptable norms caused a great amount of reprimand from the Church, as they focused primarily on sexual pleasure and blatantly disregarded morality.

Although not explicitly “libertine” in approach, the Shunga produced in Japan ascribed as well to a denouncement of sociopolitical norms through parodies of popular literature, theatre, and history. Just as with French publications of erotica in books, Japanese Shunga and pictures books allowed, by the medium of printing, a method of clever and active dissent. For these

various reasons, printmaking would be banned in the respective countries and regulations attempted to stop production, but the standards in place were unable to thoroughly eradicate the production of deviant prints.

## PRINTING

### Process and Censorship

The arrival of woodblock printmaking in Japan and etching in France allowed artists to produce diverse work at an expedited speed through blocks or plates passed through ink and paper under pressure to create an image. This introduction catalyzed the urbanization of culture and expansion of readership among the classes who could more easily afford prints rather than paintings. Charles-François Jouvain upheld the new colored prints of eighteenth century France as a medium that “compensate[d] for the inequality of fortunes by satisfying amateurs of every sort. Sovereigns, grandees, and opulent men possess paintings, and the public enjoys them in turn by way of an exact imitation acquired at little expense” (Smentek, 9). Although artists were still dependent on their creation of paintings, it also allowed for them to subsist on their independent production of prints, rather than by the whims of a single patron (Kita, 29). Printmaking also made pornography accessible to a growing middle class in both France and Japan. While floating world imagery and fleeting pleasure were reflected in painting and printmaking in France and Japan, printmaking provided a faster method and more affordable end product. Prints were sold as commercial property, rather than intellectual or scholarly, as they were not in the same high regard as more traditional mediums (Davis, 15). However, printmaking still pulled from the more traditional medium of painting, though, and the styles, symbols, and compositions reflect that which came before.

### JAPANESE WOODBLOCK

Japanese printmaking was achieved through the effort of a workshop performing in tandem according to the talents of artists working in their field of expertise. Different schools

and workshops of Ukiyo-e prints developed and taught distinctive styles. Although the final print is the result of the efforts of many artists, it is attributed to the artist who made the effort behind the original drawing that inspired the final print. For certain collections of prints, the colophon would include the names of those who worked in conjunction, especially if those artists were of the most desirable talent in the field (Davis, 72.)

After the first drawing for the print was made, it would be sent by the artist to a publisher. The publisher would refine elements of the design by adding or subtracting adjustments on pieces of thin paper tipped onto the original design according to the orders of the censor. After the drawing was ready according to those editing the piece, it would be sealed by the censor and each layer carved into multiple blocks of cherry wood. The original design for the final print was destroyed in the process of carving the first key block (Fig. 4); a block consisting of outlines of the image in black acted as the base for the rest of the subsequent colored blocks (Fig. 5). Intricately carved blocks were exacted through *kento*<sup>14</sup> markings to produce a clean final print. Occasionally, artists would paint over the final print in order to achieve the same gradations and visual effects of painting. Although a complicated process that could take weeks to complete, the wood block method made printmaking productively and fiscally a more viable option than painting, especially for mass production of popular imagery for wide consumption.

The printing process of Japan was contingent on the cooperation of groups of artists in order to complete a finished piece, therefore printing schools had to back an artist, even in secret, in order for their print to be completed and distributed. This process was not reflected in France, where the printing process of etching allowed for a single artist to create a suite of prints for easy dissemination.

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<sup>14</sup> *Kento* were a registration method used in Japanese woodblock prints in which red “L” shape markings were inscribed to line up prints; occasionally up to fifteen separate blocks (Chiappa).

## FRENCH ETCHING

Etching in France provided artists with the liberty to learn a new method of creation quickly and produce works with more creative freedom than painting. Although not among the level of professional printmakers whose purpose was to recreate academically rendered masterpieces of the time, eighteenth century *peintres graveurs*<sup>15</sup> were able to utilize this method of printmaking as a tertiary method of income. Etching was a medium that artists could explore with ease, but it was not supported as an official classification of art by the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture; which dictated the classifications of the fine arts, offered artists the opportunity to be presented at the Salon Carré, and occasionally offered the promise of royal commission.

Contrary to the collaborative process of Japanese woodblock printing, etching requires the attention of only one or two artists. A copper plate is covered in an acid resistant waxy ground and darkened by the exposure to soot. The design would either be directly carved into the ground by an etching needle or, more commonly, demarcated on paper first. The preliminary drawing would be coated on the reverse side in red or black chalk and placed on the ground of the plate. The main lines of the composition, similar to that of the key block, could then be traced in order to transfer them to the surface of the copper. Once the preparation for the subject of the print was finished, the artists would run acid over the surface of the plate in order to melt away the etched areas. Once the artist achieved their ideal image for printing, the ground would be rubbed off and the plate would be cleaned and ready to print (Hoisington, 15-19).

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<sup>15</sup> *Peintres graveurs* (literally “engraver painter”) were French artists who worked in multiple mediums, including those officially sponsored by the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, but also experimented with printmaking. They were not considered “professional” as they did not directly work within the realm of professional print practices which sought to recreate academic works.

Each process provided benefits and setbacks according to the medium in use by the artist. Regardless of their respective differences, though, the printing process allowed for artists to disperse a wide variety of prints in large amounts to the general public for a reasonable price. The ability for artists to print such imagery promoted a new market that differed from the exclusive markets selling painting and sculpture that had been established before.

#### THE MARKET AND CENSORSHIP

The French market for etchings was much less organized than the market for painting in France or even for printmaking in Japan. Dealers typically bought the original plate from the living artist or acquired it after the artist's death and continued to print editions with the original plate. Dealers collected plates and typically amassed a lofty collection of smaller prints by famous artists of the time, such as Claude Gillot. After the death of the dealer Pierre Gallay in 1735, an inventory of 4,711 copper plates was found in his stores, proving that etching, although not held as high in value as *les beaux-arts*, still engrossed collectors in Paris, gaining more prominence with time.

Artists had a relative amount of prerogative in how their prints were sold during their lifetime. Printmakers could act as their own dealer in Paris and decide to sell to multiple other dealers, sometimes changing dealers, in order to sustain their trade. This didn't prevent some shops from editing original prints on their own, though, and selling them at a higher price. Illustrations became popular within Paris and dealers preemptively sold prints at forty livres for thirty-eight prints. Once the king "subscribed" to receiving illustrations, the prices and popularity of etching went up to sixty livres for the same amount of prints (Rudy, 41-47).

The market for woodblock prints in Edo, especially that of Ukiyo-e and shunga prints compiled into Pillow Books, was aggressively competitive despite the ban on these collections

by the shogunate in 1722. Japanese markets operated similarly to the French markets with subscriptions available for consistently rising prices depending on the interest of those in power. Individuals lacking the funds to sign up for a typical subscription could borrow or rent materials from rental libraries in the city (Tinios, 83-84).

This obsession by both cultures with transient and erotic imagery was followed swiftly with the consequence of government censorship. By the eighteenth century, the popularity of Shunga caused a ban on all erotic prints and censors were employed in Japan to monitor the output of visuals. In France, beginning under the reign of Louis XIV, les *censeurs royaux* and numerous other royal guilds enforced the laws of book production (Darnton, xix). Both the Tokugawa shogunate and the French monarchy attempted to accept the depictions of the floating world, but also sought to control the process and production of works possibly threatening to their status.

*Ukiyo-e* prints in Edo were considered by the upper classes a vulgar representation of pleasure and the process of printmaking as well assumed a lack of respect through its simplicity and reproducibility. Printmaking was typically reserved in Edo and Paris to illustrate books rather than to stand alone. In comparison to painting, the process lacked the respect of the bourgeoisie, but that doesn't mean the upper classes didn't keep plenty of prints hidden in their personal residences (Art History Archive). Moralists in Edo society also feared that the availability of such imagery to the masses would cause individuals to "neglect [their] fundamental responsibilities: filiality toward [their] parents and loyalty to [their] ruler" (Tinios, 85). According to these moralists, indelicate imagery would support a culture of citizens preoccupied with sexual deviancy rather than the Confucian values instilled by the shogunate,

therefore the government issued laws prohibiting the display of sexual encounters as well as any publication attempting to inspire political discourse (Gerstle, 319).

Therefore, it became mandatory that the images produced by official print shops in Edo be sent to a censor. The shogunate had stringent restrictions in regards to published imagery and only images that didn't threaten their power were deemed appropriate (Davis, 15). When the image was finally approved by the censor as appropriate for public distribution, an individualized seal would be irremovably carved into the key block to communicate the legality of the piece (Tinios, 9-28). The specificity of a censor seal meant that a suggestive or erotic image approved by a censor could be traced back to the individual that approved the image. The approval of erotic or political images could follow with the risk of severe punishment. Most *Ukiyo-e* prints and *Shunga* were therefore produced without the approval of the official censor.

Although the reprimand for censors was severe since their approval meant the approval of the ruling shogunate, the enforcement of laws prohibiting the individual production of erotic imagery was lacking in such severity, therefore "floating" prints heavily populated the city with imagery ranging from actors and beautiful women to violence and deviant lovemaking (Hickey, 21). One could get away with publishing an image contrary to the acceptable values of the shogunate by omitting the publisher, artist, or writer, thereby making the print difficult to trace (Davis, 15). Most artists remained anonymous and could only be identified by their style or pseudonym (JAANUS). Due to the prevalence of *Ukiyo-e* prints and *Shunga* despite the will of the shogunate, new laws were continuously issued in an attempt to counter the production of imagery which would possibly threaten their authority (Gerstle, 319).

The French employed similar methods in order to protect the identity of the artist. Colophons in eighteenth century illustrated books occasionally included a false publishing

location, such as the publishing of the illustrated text *Sylvie* in “Londres: 1743” rather than the original location in Paris by the firm of Pierre Prault (Rudy, 49). Other “provocative” colophons included locations such as “at a hundred leagues from the Bastille” (Darnton, xx). Such inclusions hinted at the contents of the publication.

The title of a book could reveal the intent through linguistic clues, such as the presence of the word “philosophie” signaling a dangerous topic. Examples include two books by the Marquis de Sade: *Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795) and *Thérèse philosophe* (1748). The book vendor Hubert Carzin, interrogated in the Bastille for the possession of suspicious books and papers, explained to authorities that the term “philosophical articles,” appearing frequently in his exchange of letters with other vendors, was a “conventional expression in the book trade to characterize everything that is forbidden.” Such books were typically understood as pornography and demarcated with a cross to express a need for extreme prudence in handling (Darnton, 6-8).

Similar to the Tokugawa shogunate, the French monarchy allowed unofficial texts to be published as long as they were not blatantly threatening to the government, but the surge in the popularity of libertinism exacerbated the current procedures and caused an increased stringency in censorship. In order for a novel to be published in full, the text was required to adhere to the established parameters of the monarchy. And, as the borders of Japan were rife with black market trade of prints, the borders of France were populated by unofficial print shops, producing erotica through an underground system of publishing houses. The presence of erotica and illegal literature in France was so prominent and reflected the social climate so much that during the eighteenth century Lamoignon de Malesherbes, lawyer to Louis XIV, asserted that, “a man who had read only books that originally appeared with the formal approval of the government would be behind his contemporaries by nearly a century” (Darnton, xix).

## OBSCENITY AND EROTICA

The presence of erotic literature and visual representations of erotica throughout history is vast. Small erotic paintings have been found nestled in the helmets of Japanese warriors as early as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (JAANUS). The earliest existing *shunpon*<sup>16</sup> from 1660 is that of the anonymously authored *Yoshiwara makura-e*, in which the preface prefigures the attitude of erotic art in Japan for the next two centuries. The author asserts that “making love is the prime glory and height of pleasure” and further condemns the moralists which would seek to condemn the erotic arts as “sour lemon-eaters, stinking of Confucius...try[ing] to deceive us with talk of conscientious duty.” Sixty years following the appointment of Tokugawa Ieyasu, this anonymous author’s protestation of those that would critique shunga conveys antipathy towards the organizational *shinôkôshô* in place; favoring instead the Ukiyo and libertine acts that would deliberately defy the propriety of the shogunate.

The indelicate images produced in France and Japan were largely in part produced with inspiration pulled from theatre and literature. These productions provided narratives, characters, and aesthetics that artists could pull from in order to create an image resembling another facet of the fleeting world; tying together multiple forms of escapism with the main efforts being the inspiration of pleasure and social discourse.

## THEATRE

Theatre plays an integral part in the production of erotic imagery and the conveyance of social unrest and irony. Erotic lithography and Shunga each share the inclination for depicting theatrical performances and express a dialogue between the stage and the print. In Japan, Kabuki and Noh theatre played a vital role in the production of popular Ukiyo-e prints. Many erotic

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<sup>16</sup> The term *shunpon* denotes a pornographic book.

collections were based on the narratives of the stage. Likewise, the French Opera, Carnevale<sup>17</sup>, and ballet performances inspired the depiction of fleeting subjects, large parties, and clandestine encounters of artists such as Jean-Antoine Watteau. Not only did the situations of the stage inspire the artists of Edo and Paris, but the culture surrounding the theatre provided a space as well where the flaunting of false wealth and voyeurism was condoned as a distraction of the working class.

The Yoshiwara district of Edo, containing the theaters and brothels, was the only area of the city where *chōnin* law<sup>18</sup> was not enforced and where the most affluent of the *chōnin* class could express their wealth uninhibited by *shinōkōshō*. Just as the images of the floating world depict a world beyond the boundaries of the real, the district of Yoshiwara provided a space in which the *chōnin* could play at being aristocrats. This façade was maintained so long as the merchants understood their true place in society (Kita, 29-39). The Yoshiwara district and other similar pleasure quarters were sequestered from the rest of the city, allowing for a separate culture of pleasure to thrive on the borders of Edo.

Within the Yoshiwara district, the playhouses gave performances of Kabuki and Noh theatre which would inform the prints produced of the Ukiyo. Actors often replaced the position of politicians in prints as an unthreatening alternative until the Tenmei Era (1781-1789) under the Tokugawa shogunate, in which the shogunate exercised austerity in economic affairs in response to recession and food shortage. This abrupt change along with an ensuing famine

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<sup>17</sup> Although Italian in its conception, Carnevale is an annual masquerade of the Christian celebration for Lent. The elaborate costumes and masks greatly informed the painting styles of Rococo.

<sup>18</sup> *Chōnin* were the working class of Edo according to *shinōkōshō*. The laws surrounding *chōnin* were established by the shogunate in order to keep the growing wealth of the merchant and working classes under control. These regulations were relieved only in the Yoshiwara district.

disrupted the public and caused a backlash which manifested in woodblock prints delineating caricatures of the political climate and social life (Ono, 292).

Just as the Kabuki theatre, the French Opera was a source of delight for viewers, transporting the individual temporarily to another space. The design of the Royal Opera House (1753-1770) was inspired in great part by the combination of the Classical and Rococo. Jean-Antoine Watteau's *fêtes galantes* and *fêtes venetiennes* scenes include opulent figures in the style of performers of the opera-ballet and those of the *commedia dell'arte*, the opulent Italian theatre in France known for costumes, stock characters, and acrobatics. The theatre of France entertained certain popular narratives to aid in conversation and the genre of comedy especially informed such discussion (Hyde, 150). *L'opéra-comique* and the plays of Molière sustained dialogue over certain serious topics, such as the ignorance of the bourgeoisie (*Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670)) or the hypocrisy of the church (*Tartuffe* (1664)), better approached with scandal or humor.

Such spectacle became inspiring for the general aesthetic of Rococo Art. *Les jaloux* (Fig. 6),<sup>19</sup> submitted by Jean-Antoine Watteau to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in 1712, succinctly describes the types of scenes informed by the pleasure of the theatre in France (Milam, 266). The four main figures are seated in a pastoral setting just off center with musical instruments. Their opulent clothing is directly derivative of *commedia dell'arte* and the costumes of French Opera. The setting as well insinuates a staged moment, in which the characters are lit as if participating in a performance.

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<sup>19</sup> The jealous ones

## LITERATURE

Literature, just as the theatre, aids in the inspiration of erotica in Japan and France. Literature provided a narrative and social stance with which one could create a print to be understood by illiterate audiences of the time. Many Shunga and French prints were informed by such literature and utilized these narratives to create satirical drama in images that would be immediately understood by a variety of people.

The printmakers of Japan utilized popular literature and poetry to express delight in sexual encounters. Most literature that was introduced into Ukiyo culture was subsequently eroticized and circulated as pornography. The Floating World began a “Genjization” of erotica based on the popular literature of Murasaki Shikibu in the eleventh century; *The Tale of Genji*. The courtesans and visitors of the Yoshiwara district began using characters and terms from *The Tale of Genji* to adopt pseudonyms, speak about hidden lovers (*broom-tree*), or refer to common items such as money (*heart vine*) or perfume (*Genji fragrances*). The use of *The Tale of Genji* in the Yoshiwara district bred a plethora of *Genji*-based erotica and the combined popularity of the Yoshiwara district and the “Genjization” of sexual encounters caused the publishing of cautionary verses, such as a verse from 1705:

“Even *Genji*  
 Can be a poison  
 To young minds”

These verses sought to caution individuals seeking access to the pleasure quarters. Erotic representations of popular literature successfully romanticized a culture suffering from venereal

disease and social inequalities, proving that life separate from the Ukiyo was far from desirable (Screech, 257-260).

Popular literature in France, like Japan, appropriated mythology and accepted narratives in order to depict erotica, but French literature was also created for the sole purpose of advertising a new political and social stance through the liberated body.

The literature of Rousseau and Voltaire, notable for influencing the French Revolution, were not popularly sought out until after 1780. Erotic literature such as *L'école des filles* or *La philosophie des dames* (1655) is considered one of the first instances of pornography circulating in France. It's possible that it was modelled off an earlier Italian novel, but the specific version has yet to be identified. Other erotic novels were inspired by *L'école des filles*, such as *Thérèse philosophe* (1748) by the Marquis de Sade. The spread of literacy in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries caused concern for the bourgeoisie classes who held all of the wealth and power of the country and according to Robert Darnton, the "sector" of illegal literature in France was "enormous." (Darnton, xix).

Since theatre and literature provided a foundation for humor and satire, such parodies of these arts through erotic prints created a safe area in which artists could gradually attempt to transgress the restrictions on social commentary and make known to the public through frivolity the oppression of the government.

#### THE NUDE BODY AND AMOROUS ENCOUNTERS

The representation of the nude body was approached from two different perspectives in printmaking based on the materials available. The formulation and articulation of anatomy was based on the primary medium used to depict the subject. Primarily utilizing the woodblock method with an emphasis on line and color, Japan depicted bodies with more emphasis on

sinuous line work and patterned fabrics, while their French counterparts favored the illusion of three-dimensional flesh through the medium of etching. This caused each country to favor differing sensual triggers, such as patterns in clothing suggesting svelte bodies or gradations in flesh suggesting the forms of muscles.

Unlike the French, the Japanese did not have a “genre” for nude images, since the image of the nude body carried no immediate sense of sensuality if divorced from the prospect of intercourse, bathing, or dressing. Clothing was considered more of a secondary sex characteristic than the parts of the body. This can be seen in Kitagawa Utamaro’s *A Woman and a Cat* (c.1793-1794) (Fig.7). The sensuality of the woman lies in the diaphanous patterned fabric draped across her partially exposed body. A kitten pulls at the fabric of her clothing in the bottom right corner, suggesting a playful lack of concern for concealing her breasts or legs, which blend with the lines of the cascading fabric. The woman also clutches a corner of the pink fabric in her mouth, suggesting her candid sexuality to the viewer.

Despite the immediate visual differences, the depiction of the naked body in Japan and France represented a source of titillation for viewers. Portraits of women exhibiting sexual characteristics, primary or secondary, were legal and popular. In the West, the nude was celebrated as the second most valued genre of painting behind history painting for its purity and celebration of form. In order to curtail the eroticism of nude sculpture and painting, the Church used fig leaves as a method of censorship, based on the Biblical narrative of Adam and Eve. The eroticism of the nude, although largely brushed over, was indisputable as a personal source of physical delight despite the veils of mythology and allegory.

SEXUAL DEVIANCY

Although the depiction of intercourse was in itself an affront to the standards set by the shogunate and the monarchy, artists still pursued representations of erotica and delved further into realms of sexual deviancy<sup>20</sup>. Masturbation, same-sex encounters, and interspecies relations characterize some of the erotica circulating as a direct response to sexual repression by the government. Japan and France differ somewhat in their consideration of what is deviant, but any method of intercourse involving pleasure over procreation was generally considered atypical.

Gender was an uncertain distinction, whether or not male and female principles were binary or had the capability to act as fluid. In the late eighteenth century, an interest in the natural sciences extended a gendered existence not limited to just humans and animals, but plants as well, suggesting a more scientific rather than religious or social approach to sexuality. The scholar Carl Peter Thunberg travelled to Japan in 1775 with the Dutch East India Company, sharing with the Japanese various medical tools and maintained contact with other scholars in Edo. The concept of gender not being limited to human anatomy began a popularity with interspecies sexuality; humans and human-plant hybrids copulated in prints with other plants and animals (Screech, 100-104).

The mutability of gender and depictions of interspecies sensuality was a common trait in the East and the West. Men and women commonly donned the clothing and characteristics of the opposite gender in order to become that gender. Effectuated by the popularity of theatre, cross-dressing and gender masquerade became popular in the eighteenth century in both Japan and France and role reversal was equally represented in erotic prints, formulating a commentary on the dynamics of the political climate within government systems.

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<sup>20</sup> Sexual deviancy is used here to describe any sexual act that deviates from sexual intercourse dedicated to the sole purpose of procreation, therefore anything with the purpose of sole physical delight is going to be considered “deviant.”

Representations of the nude body initiate the sensuality which would transform into the genre of explicit eroticism. Such representations allowed access to representations of the nude through a fantasy realm of pleasure, but also depicted melancholic, violent, or humorous scenes in which the poignant reality of the time would be expressed.

## REVOLUTION AND RESTORATION

### SOCIAL DISSENT

Within each culture, the lower working classes comprised the majority of the population, therefore it was a necessity for the government to attempt to placate or distract its citizens through frivolous art. Paintings allowed for artists to depict frivolity and delightful endeavors, but did not allow for the same admonition of government as printmaking. With drawing and printmaking, the artist could quickly and directly satirize political and religious figures. Such private mediums allowed for printmakers to easily use their medium as a tool for the distribution of propaganda against the pressures of the government. Denis Diderot claimed “the graphic arts” in the *Encyclopédie* “as the new mode of practical communication that reached beyond the private aristocratic sphere” (Nacol, 10-11).

During the totalitarian rule of the shogunate, citizens were forbidden from participating in or commenting on the operations of the government. Kabuki theatre and woodblock prints were the only method by which artists could critique the shogunate through depictions of a world intended to be a fantasy. The Japanese scholars Asō Isoji and Teruoka Yasutaka considered these methods a “weapon” by which the artist could “resist” the policies of an oppressive government (Gerstle, 318-321).

The political cartoon surfaced in Japan during the latter years of the Tokugawa shogunate and the beginning of the Meiji Restoration. Despite the previous existence of political satire (*Toba-ehon*<sup>21</sup>) during the Tenmei era, British army officer Charles Wirgman catalyzed the

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<sup>21</sup> *Toba-ehon* or *Toba-e* were anonymously produced picture books during the eighteenth century in which the artist conveyed political messages or hidden meanings through complex puzzles. The visual puns of *Toba-e* made available to the illiterate populations of Japan a means of keeping up with political and social events.

production of Japanese political prints during his presence working in ports and satirizing the port culture in Yokohama through print productions of *Japan Punch*.

The genres of Ukiyo-e and Shunga, valuing primarily the beauty of the print, opted for hidden meanings, visual symbols, or linguistic puns or puzzles. Many printmakers as well revealed in the later eighteenth century an introspection divulging the flaws of the Ukiyo; creating characters with dissonant expressions confessing the bitterness of the ephemerality of their position. The printmaker Suzuki Harunobo represents in delicate lines the melancholic expressions of his figures in prints such *The Fashionable Romantic Adventures of Maneemon* (1768) (Fig. 10). In this image, a calligraphy student is being persuaded into a physical encounter by her instructor. The instructor's interest in the moment is not shared by the coerced girl, confessing a bitter side to publications of Shunga. In other scenes, characters may express physical enjoyment of their respective encounters, but facial expressions admit a level of disinterest (Calzan).

By the second half of the seventeenth century, the erotic prints circulating in Edo became less about the aesthetic refinement of Edo citizens and more about opulence, struggle, and occasionally violence (Calza, 9). Parody and satire were essential aspects of Shunga, which served as the perfect method of dissent since the prints were already produced without the permission of the government. According to C. Andrew Gerstle, the essential humor of Shunga “disarm[ed]” the viewer and made the concepts of both sexual pleasure and political dissent a viable source of entertainment (Gerstle, 318). Artists of parody and Shunga claimed to make such directed jests towards religious or political figures of the court “playfully” (Kita, 40).

The shogunate ensured that the mounting pressure of *shinôkôshô* and the prejudices against the working class could be released through the production of images of the floating

world, emphasizing fantasy and materialism over social equanimity. The Tokugawa shogunate therefore tightened their hold over the *chōnin* class through strict laws, but offered a simultaneous acknowledgement of their floating world. Through this system, the shogunate was able to maintain full control over the working lower classes who were expressing their admonition of a regime, drunk on their own ability to encourage the fantasy of those below them (Kita, 35).

Although not immediately derisive towards the ruling shogunate, artists participating in satirical representations of eroticism would recall other famous Japanese figures in history in order to disenfranchise their authority. *Makura dōji nukisashi manben tamaguki (Pillow Book for the Young: All You Need to Know about How the Jeweled Rod Goes In and Out)* (1776) comprises of 114 pages filled with erotic scenes of popular Japanese figures from history. Achieved by the combined efforts of Takehara Shunchōsai, Masuya Tairyō, and Nakarai Kinryō, the book is a blatant parody of educational literature. Through vicious wordplay and visual cues, the famous figures mentioned in the book are rendered “rapacious sexual beasts.” One of the scenes in the book surrounds the endeavors of Empress Kōmyō, the first century consort of Nara Period Emperor Shōmu (Fig. 11). The print of Empress Kōmyō is divided into four sections with the action happening in the top left quadrant. The Empress is shown with a lover just after orgasm. The remaining areas of the print contain narrative historical context, describing the “lecher” Empress and her sexual exploits. The text serving as dialogue between the two characters in the print confesses the delight of Empress Kōmyō: “Wha...I’m exhausted! And finally I feel satisfied” Although represented in popular culture as a “model empress and woman,” this parody salaciously attacks her position in the court as the “god of horny women” and “greatest lecher in all Japan” (Gerstle, 343). Selecting a historical figure divorced from the

contemporary political affairs of the shogunate allowed artists to critique politics and court dynamics without attracting the repercussions of the government.

Satirical publications also critiqued the Confucian foundations of Japanese societal norms found in educational textbooks aimed at the moral conduct of women. Such blatant contrast is revealed when comparing two diametrically opposed sources of female “education”: *Onna daigaku takara-bako* (*Treasure Chest of Great Learning for Women*) (1716) by Kashiwaraya Sei’emon and *Onna dairaku takara-beki* (*Great Pleasures for Women and their Treasure Boxes*) (1755) by Tsukioka Settei. The former text, reissued every twenty years until the nineteenth century, is bound to Confucian values of obedience, self-control, and charity. The book indicates the expectations of women during their lifetime as a devotion to their profession, family, and strictly condemns acts of sexuality meant for pleasure rather than procreation. Denoting the risks of sexuality, the book explicitly states: “on producing heirs [...] if you have too much sexual desire, you won’t get pregnant; if you are too wildly passionate, you won’t get pregnant.” Such restrictive expectations surrounding the body promoted the second text, *Onna dairaku takara-beki*. Even in name, the text pulls from the former publication and directly appropriates the meaning of the title to suggest a derisive platform. The latter publication from 1755 reverses the Confucian ideal in favor of the libertine woman and encourages women to seek out pleasure in their life. The text also mentions a diverse array of pleasurable activities omitted from the Confucian publication including same sex encounters and diverse expression of sexuality. A print from the Confucian text demonstrates women in the process of making *sōmen* (Fig. 12). This image includes an epithet on the modesty of women as they go about their daily life. Referencing this text, the satirical book includes an image of a pair of lovers engaging in sexual

intercourse amidst the same *sōmen* drying on racks (Fig. 13). The text in this case supports the expression of passion:

“A woman should consider the beneficence of the penis more important than that of her parents and respect it more. For example, if your husband brings dildos and other sex toys into the bedroom for play, these are not for his pleasure. You should realize that he is thinking of you and how to give you pleasure. If one of you has an orgasm, the other will get pleasure too. There is no one to treasure more than your husband”<sup>22</sup> (Gerstle, 339).

The appropriation of the *Onna daigaku takara-bako* demonstrates the opposition of Japanese citizens to Confucian expectations and political sovereignty through the representation of erotica.

The French approached political dissent in a similar method. By attacking the societal expectations of chastity and the political figures of the monarchy, artists disenfranchised those in power. The nihilistic approach towards political critique enacted by French writers and artists depicted gender and sexual endeavors as representative of an abstract realm similar to the Ukiyo. Representations of sexual domination played a key role in depicting the reversal of roles politically and socially as well, symbolizing the disorganization of those in power.

Organized religion was included in this mockery with images such as *La messe de quatre heures (Four o'clock mass)* (Fig. 14) by Claude Desrais, depicting a priest and a nun engaging in a sexual act in church as an ironic statement against clerical purity. The Church condoned depictions of possibly erotic images when the purpose was intended to be primarily of a

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<sup>22</sup> Although both texts are opposite in their approach to sexuality, they do not differ in their expectation for women to marry and remain under her husband's household. Such books reveal implicit hypocritical expectations in regards to females: that they be simultaneously chaste and passionate.

“philosophical” nature. Artists would therefore utilize popular mythology as a method of masking the blatant eroticism of the image and rendering the concept of the painting more high-brow than pornographic representations. Paintings by François Boucher stand out in their mythological masks, such as *Leda and the Swan* (c.1740) (Fig. 15) or *Mars and Venus Surprised by Vulcan* (1754) (Fig. 16). These images exemplify highly eroticized “philosophical” paintings. The classicism of such images allowed for artists like Boucher to depict images otherwise forbidden by the Church, therefore the monarchy as well. The act of making love is more suggested than depicted, with Mars and Venus interrupted by Vulcan, or Leda who is not aware of the approaching Zeus, disguised as a swan at the foot of her bed. The playful color suggests an uplifting mood while the subjects of the painting are asserted as being mythological characters. By utilizing certain characters and methods of painting, the images are able to pass by the regulations of the church; using sex as an allegory for other narratives rather than depicting erotic encounters for the pleasure of the viewer. Once artists began to depict the “modern” individuals unmasked by mythology and acts meant solely for pleasure, though, the Church deemed such images contraband. Many artist’s response to the illegalization of images by the Church favored humorous erotic images such as *La messe de quatre heures* with the members of the church as the main characters of scandalous relations and sexual curiosities. The intent of these images was the exposure of Christianity and the hypocrisy of the Church; an institution which, at the time, experienced significant power politically.

Political figures were targeted as well for their corruption such as Marie Antoinette, who symbolized to the French population “national degradation” and the accumulation of vice. A collection of prints in the *Vie privée, libertine, et scandaleuse de Marie-Antoinette d’Autriche* (1793) exemplifies the ability of the printmaker to deprive a political figure of their public

respect (Nacol, 11-12). The frontispiece of the book includes a portrait of the queen dressed in a blue cape (Fig. 17). The cape covers her head, but her breasts are left bare above the collar of her dress below. The frame surrounding the figure serves to act as a mirror, surrounded by items of vanity, sexuality, and violence to denote the vices of the queen. An inscription can be read below her portrait which speaks to the disdain of the public: “In vain one seeks in his memory the name of those abhorred. One cannot find in history one name that could be compared to her name.”<sup>23</sup> Such condemnation of the queen represents an acute hatred for her political presence. The hyperbolic phrase suggests that even though it is difficult to conjure the names of those through history, the names of those abhorred are easily accessed. The recollection of Marie Antoinette here is indelible in the memory of French citizens for her crimes against the values of the *Ancien Régime*. Throughout the anonymous publication, prints of Marie Antoinette exhibit the infamous queen acting in scenes that seek to corroborate rumors of her adultery and sexual escapades, including scenes of general adultery (Fig. 17, right), same-sex encounters (Fig. 18), and group scenes (Fig. 19), all with the objective of condemning the authority of the monarchy through the disenfranchisement of one of its primary figures.

In regards to the political climate of France surrounding the Revolution, gender roles are also inverted in erotic representations as a form of critique. In literature and visual representation of erotic acts, women typically are placed in the dominating role or a story of sexual awakening is told from a feminine point of view<sup>24</sup>. The Marquis de Sade’s *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), through the sexual discoveries of Eugénie, contains consistent admonitions of the *Ancien*

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<sup>23</sup> “En vain l’on cherche en sa mémoire le nom des êtres abhorres. On n’en trouve point dans l’histoire qui lui puisse être compares.”

<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that women during this period had any role in the creation of erotic literature or imagery. Many of the books and images discussed in this thesis are those of men. The employment of a woman’s voice in erotica was for the erotic appeal of the reader as a voyeur into the female mind as well as the political critique of role reversal as mentioned above.

*Régime* through role inversion and deviant sexual encounters. Published just after the start of the French Revolution, *La philosophie dans le boudoir* asserts a nihilist, libertine approach to the physical world. The main characters flagrantly condemn the values of the fallen monarchy, such as religious devotion, morality, and modesty in favor of individual liberty. Prints from *La philosophie dans le boudoir* exhibits the alternative sexual encounters that characterize the beliefs of de Sade (Fig. 3). Figures engage in acts contrary to the formerly established regulations of the monarchy, some of which inventively conjure the process of torture in the mind of the viewer. The account of Eugénie's sexual growth and explorative liberties speaks to the fear by the Marquis de Sade that individuals who would remain faithful to the values of the *Ancien Régime* would be condemned to a second monarchy. Angela Rene Nacol succinctly analyzes erotic representations of pre-revolutionary France, in which "male and female bodies act[ed] out transgressions, societal reversals, and exhibitionism that reflected the disorderly body politic of France surrounding the tumultuous period of the Revolution" (Nacol, 7).

## REVOLUTION AND RESTORATION

Pleasure intrinsically shaped and mutated the citizens of each regime into a state of recognition; that through a "floating world" the individual might acknowledge their direct oppression. The illegal erotic representations of France and Japan ignited in their populations a dissent for fantasy and a desire for real change. The erotica produced in each country became symptomatic of sexually repressive governments and a yearning for freedom. These derisive prints produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are symptomatic of the ensuing social reconstructions that brought about the modernization of France and Japan.

The dispersal of philosophical literature and politically contemptuous prints regarding the rights of the people and the vices of the monarchy quickly culminated over a century and

precipitated the French Revolution in 1789. The fleeting world was quickly abandoned and by 1796, the studio workers of academic painter Jacques-Louis David began to apply Rococo as a “derogatory term” reflecting the frivolous whims of the fallen *Ancien Régime* (Milam, xxvi). A poignant gesture symbolizing the fall of the fleeting world, the theatres of Paris began to pull down the mandatory veils mounted between the audience and the stage<sup>25</sup>, crying out “Vive la Liberté!” tearing apart the disillusion of ephemeral pleasures and escapism (Huet, 137). After the French Revolution, the Hellenistic worldview was reestablished through the pedagogical style of Neoclassicism, valuing again qualities such as symmetry, rigidity, and morality.

Almost a century later, the Meiji Restoration occurred in Japan with similar results. The feudal shogunate fell and a parliamentary government was established with the Emperor Meiji in 1868. The fall of the shogunate promoted the Westernization of the country and ignited the relationship between Japan and Europe. The woodblock prints of the Edo period remained a popular tool for artistic production until the end of the nineteenth century, but with drastic changes in content following the social changes of the government. The new regime sought to “civilize and enlighten” Japan through further restrictions of the pleasure quarters and censorship of Shunga<sup>26</sup>.<sup>1</sup> These restrictions did not completely stop the production of Shunga, but authorities attempted to cease activities such as erotic printmaking, public bathing, and sex work in an effort to appeal to the Western world, which was ironically attempting the same thing. During this time, Japanese soldiers sent to war in 1894-95 were provided with “bullet proof” Shunga as “victory pictures,” connecting the new condoned use of Shunga during the Meiji

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<sup>25</sup> With the recognition of the power of theatre as a sociopolitical tool, such veils were placed between the spectators and the stage in order to separate realities. Other strict regulations had been placed on theatres prior to the Revolution, such as the prevention of language: actors were not permitted to sing or use placards to communicate to the audience.

Restoration to the prints found in soldier's helmets in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By the year 1905, almost all production of Ukiyo-e prints had come to a stop.

The contact between France and Japan bred representations and appropriations of popular imagery in each country. *Japonisme*, the appropriation of traditional Japanese aesthetics by French artists, became wildly popular in Europe. Artists like Mary Cassatt and Claude Monet found inspiration in the key-block derived outlines and bold colors of Japanese prints, such as Cassatt's *The Letter* (1891) (Fig. 20). The image shows a woman in a vibrantly patterned blue dress with a letter pressed between her lips, similar to the fabric between the lips of *A Woman and a Cat* (Fig. 7). Japan also found inspiration in the imagery of Western painters, specifically in representations of the nude, which can be found in the print *Woman after Bath* (1920) by the artist Hashiguchi Goyo. The image depicts a nude woman in a style recalling both the delicate female beauties and fabric patterns of Kitagawa Utamaro and the elongated bodies of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (Fig. 21) (Blood, 140-145).

These representations mixing the styles and subjects of French and Japanese art corroborate visual similarities and subject preferences before their extensive contact in the later years of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. Drastic social reconstruction plunged both countries into the modern world and rendered them compatible in artistic production.

## CONCLUSION

The floating world is an ephemeral place of escapism under pressure. The prints of Japan and France before the nineteenth century depict a world obviously nonexistent and out of reach for the citizens of absolute feudal regimes. Such mutable transitory spaces allowed for artists, writers, and actors to communicate their disdain to the masses, reproaching the established mores of the monarchy and the shogunate. A sense of humor and sensuality abounded in these worlds where the body was used as a messenger of dissent. Political and historical figures were salaciously reprimanded by the public through licentious depictions of their lives. An embrace of the bittersweet and expressions of libertine philosophies caused a rift between the people and the governing forces ignoring those citizens.

The correlation between erotic dissent and political upheaval narrates a period of history in which two countries approached power with satire in order to bring attention to a lack of equilibrium between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Binary exercises of power such as those exhibited by the monarchy and the shogunate during their later years provoke in part the subsequent disgrace of their authority through printmaking. France and Japan during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represent unique displays of disapproval in which political messages could be found in the least expected space: The Ukiyo. These events represent a ubiquitous connection between active defiance, erotica, and social change.

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